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Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

ABM: A New Soviet Violation

Top-secret intelligence that the Soviet Union has "calibrated" its air-defense radars with ABM radars, a flagrant treaty violation, is further souring the Reagan administration on the desirability of new nuclear treaties with Moscow.

Quite apart from private top-level skepticism about the efficacy of SALT agreements, alarm is growing that a Soviet territorial defense against strategic missile attack may be nearer realization than seemed possible only a year ago. Such a defense would violate the antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty of 1972. It could make the Soviet Union the paramount power, transforming superpower relations.

Ominous Soviet passage toward protection against possible American retaliation for a first-strike attack is killing what little zest the administration has had for new nuclear agreements. That presages a Geneva follow-on summit, tentatively set for this summer, that will produce nothing in the way of new arms treaties, leaving the United States free to pursue its own nuclear defenses—the futuristic SDI for the 21st century.

Arms control skeptics are angling for just such a non-result. This is not rejection of nuclear treaties to prevent a return of détente. Far from it. The mood is fear: no matter how skillfully U.S. negotiators attempt to close noncompliance escape hatches, ways to cheat will be found and exercised by Moscow.

The new evidence, acquired by the electronic miracles of U.S. satellites, appears to be definitive. A relatively old "Square Pair" radar for the SA-5 anti-aircraft missile has been "calibrated" with a giant ABM-3 battle-management radar, the two having been moved next to each other in the vicinity of Moscow. The larger ABM radar appears designed to zero in on the incoming missile, then turn it over to SA-5, which fires its own missiles into the target.

This marriage between the two dissimilar radars, called "inter-netting," may well be the clinching evidence that the Soviets are preparing the SA-5 radar-interceptor for an active ABM role—Forbidden by treaty. The significance goes far because the United States estimates there are no fewer than 2,500 SAM-5s in the Soviet Union. They are concentrated in four areas: the Moscow-Leningrad salient, the Caucasus, the Far East and the populated area of Siberia (near the Krasnoyarsk ABM radar, which the United States claims is a treaty violation). The 1972 treaty gave each side the right to defend its capital with a missile defense system—but only the capital.

SALT violations were routinely minimized by pre-Reagan administrations. Indeed, the arms control "process," which produced the SALT and ABM treaties, made a comeback in the year leading up to the Geneva summit. But since the summit, the Soviet proposal to rid the world of all nuclear weapons has struck the Reagan White House as a propaganda trumpet, not a serious arms control proposal.

But the true measure of the administration's growing concern about any new treaty is not current negotiating problems in the Geneva arms talks (recessed last week at a standstill). The real source of concern is that no new agreement would be worth any more than the depreciating value of existing treaties.

In his white paper of Soviet violations, made public this weekend after being held up by the State Department for five weeks, arms control director Kenneth Adelman said that continuing Soviet violations "cannot help but have an impact upon our long-term

security" and "jeopardize the process" of arms control. Privately, Adelman has warned in the highest administration councils about the dangers of new agreements.

In Brussels this week, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger raises the alarm further. He will inform NATO defense ministers that "taken together, all the ABM and ABM-related activities" suggest preparations by the Soviets "to deploy rapidly" a territorial ABM defense.

Those words, written before Weinberger and his men were aware of the new intelligence on those 2,500 SAM-5s, hint that without revolutionary upgrading in verification procedures, no new treaty is worth having.

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